

# THE PARISH MESSENGER

A PERSONAL VISITOR TO THE PARISHES

DECEMBER, 1961

SELKIRK, MANITOBA

## Christmas Message

*By The Rev. O. Donald Olsen, Argyle Parish*

What is Christmas: a holiday, good times with friends, family gatherings, a gift receiving time? Yes, it is all of these. But isn't it true of us that, too often, we are superficial and we shop with such a list and without overtly expressing it, assume that this is all there is to this Season.

May we also think of the deep significance of the celebration of the Child of Bethlehem's birth. In the book of Isaiah, there is described a version of the day when this Child will be born and these words are written: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in

the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." (Isaiah 9:2)

The Christmas Gift that counts is God's Son coming to dwell with men at one point in history. It is Light, because God revealed and salvation has begun, which shines upon the darkness of man's ignorance of God and men's involvement in sin and death. From that Light, that began to shine on the first Christmas, we have received deliverance from sin, death and the power of the devil, and in their place, membership in the Kingdom of God and Life Eternal.

Don't forget to look beyond the frills to the greatest part of Christmas: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11).



### *News From the Great White Father*

A missionary to the primitive tribes of the State of Mato Grosso, Brazil, attracted the curiosity of local residents by sitting and staring at small pieces of paper. This was his mail, but the unsophisticated villagers were unaware of the fact; they had never seen writing or printing.

When asked why he looked at the bits of paper, he explained that this  
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*Excerpt From Report of President E. J. Eylands*  
*To Synod Convention at St. Stephen's Church, Winnipeg, June 11-14*

About a year ago it was my privilege to visit the Holy Land and to view some of the scenes and places associated with the life and work of our Lord. This was a refreshing and highly rewarding experience. I was particularly impressed by the scenes around the Lake of Galilee. Many of the localities allegedly connected with the Life of our Lord and pointed out to a traveller in various parts of the country are very doubtful, but of Galilee we are certain. It was here that He both began "to do and to Teach" (Acts 1:1). This locality must be seen as the point of departure for the movement which later came to be known as Christianity. We know that it was around the Northern edge of that beautiful lake that our Lord called his first disciples, it was here that He preached His first sermons, and it was here that He performed His first miracles. Here springs a pure fountain, containing the water of life which has quenched the thirst of all generations since His day. As you linger and meditate concerning this fountain and the river of eternal life which has flowed from it through all lands and centuries since, you may shudder at the thought of all

the irrelevant material that has been thrown into it, how it has been colored, turned and twisted as it wound its way through the dry land of human thought until you hardly recognize it for what once it was. It is indeed sad to contemplate what the "fury of the theologians" has done to the church of Jesus Christ. One can only wonder whether, if our Lord came back to earth, He would recognize His church with all its branches and sub-branches, its gimmicks and gadgets, as the movement which He founded of old on the shores of the Lake of Galilee.

I hope it is not presumptuous to say that we hope He would recognize our Lutheran Church as a part of His true church. After all, our church represented at its inception an attempt to come back to the pure and simple foundation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our theology contains nothing newfangled or sensational. It is, as we all know, based squarely on the New Testament and on the thesis that man is naturally sinful, and constantly in need of God's forgiving grace. After two World Wars and an apparently universal collapse, no further documentation is needed for the argument that sin is always with us, and that the New Testament teaching of salvation through faith in Christ is the only answer to today's religious uncertainty.

But the Gospel which was preached in Galilee of old was intended for ALL nations. It is comparatively recently that the Lutheran Church has caught this vision of the universality of the Gospel. For three hundred years or more, most of the Lutheran Churches on this continent could be identified by

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## *The Rev. Frank Schmitt Accepts Call To Arborg*

The Rev. Frank Schmitt of Riverside, California, has accepted the call to become pastor of the Arborg and Geysir Lutheran congregations. The congregations are thankful for his acceptance because this was the seventh call extended.

Pastor and Mrs. Schmitt, with their three year old daughter, Brenda, arrived to take up their new duties at the end of October. Pastor Schmitt's undergraduate work was completed at Midland College, Fremont, Nebraska, and he attended Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, graduating in 1958. Since that time, he had been serving Grace Lutheran Church of Riverside, California. He guided this congregation through a successful building program. We welcome the Schmitts into our midst, and pray for God's blessing upon them in their new field of labor.



**Rev. Frank Schmitt**

### *News from the Great White Father*

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was the way he received news. Later, when the same group saw him reading his Bible, he explained that from this Book he received news of God, the great Father of all.

From that time on, the people would approach him and ask, "What news is there today from the great Father?"

What news indeed! Wherever the Bible goes today with its message of peace and hope and the coming of the Christ Child, it is always news.

This year as you plan your Christmas list, may each Christmas card sent and each Christmas package wrapped become in a very deep sense a symbol of the spiritual

meaning of Christmas. May they remind everyone that the Good News of Christ's love to a needy world must be shared by millions who, their lives darkened by grief or sin, ask daily, "What news is there today from the great Father?"

The Rev. O. Donald Olson has resigned as pastor of the Argyle Parish, where he served as pastor for three and a half years. On Jan. 1, 1961, Pastor Olson leaves for Calgary, Alberta, where he has accepted a Call from the Board of American Missions to develop a Mission Church in the north west of the city. Pastor Olson has also resigned his office of Secretary of Synod because of this move. We wish the Olsen family God's blessing in their new work.

*Excerpt From President's Report (con't)*

their European origin. They were Germans, Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, Slovaks, Finns, Estonians or Icelanders. The Lutheran Synods were based on this nationalistic background. In their Evangelist efforts there was only the INREACH aimed at the people of other nationalistic background we heard but little. Nor was this to be expected. In many of these nationalistic Synods, worship services and sermons were mainly in the language of these nations. The old fashioned Norwegian Pastor could not enlist the co-operation of Germans in his congregation or vice versa, because of the language barrier. A minister of the old school was urged to organize a broad campaign for new members, but he protested saying it would be a waste of time because there are no unchurched Swedes there. In one of the Northern states a Norwegian Pastor reported to his council after an Evangelistic visitation which had just been concluded, "We have in the area sixty-seven Christians and one Ic-lander."

But all this has changed, or is changing. Lutheran leaders have come to realize that our church cannot be true to our Lord's commission if it keeps on concentrating on the descendants of the original European Lutheran settlers. The pioneers did valiant work and the only type of work that could be expected of them under the prevailing circumstances. But changed conditions demand new methods and these have been adopted. There is a new surge of Evangelism in our church and a new sense of responsibility for the universal and international character of the Gospel.

Since the Lutheran church became truly Evangelical and international in spirit our people have been amazed at the success of their appeal to the unchurched. We are

almost nonplussed at our own audacity after generations of shy Scandinavian reticence and stubborn German aloofness. Until recently Lutherans in North America were divided into sixteen separate bodies. Obviously all of these were not based only on nationalistic lines, but also on real or imaginary differences in doctrine. We Lutherans have always been champions for controversy. Some of these controversies have been pathetic rather than profitable. It may be mentioned that the Ohio and Iowa Synods debated doctrinal differences for fifteen years amid bitter name calling, and then finally merged. One leader in the United States of America observed a few years ago that we Lutherans had less to divide us than the members of any other denomination and yet we magnify our almost invisible differences more than any other group. Another leading churchman remarked humorously, "We Lutherans not only argue such ridiculous propositions as how many angels can dance on the point of a needle, but we dispute whether angels should be dancing at all."

We as a denomination, have long agreed to disagree, but now with the nationalistic lines fading out and the subjects of controversy almost exhausted, our camps are beginning to draw together with rapid strides. Instead of sixteen Synods of a few years ago, we shall soon have only three main groups; the Missouri Synod, the American Lutheran Church, and the pending merger, which for lack of a more distinctive name, plan to call themselves the LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA.

Now where do we of the Icelandic Synod fit into this total picture. We have been true to the North

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# How The Lutheran Church In North America Looks To Me

*By Pastor Ingthor Indridason*

Those of you who were at the convention in Selkirk two years ago, will remember that at that convention Pastor Bjarman and I were received into the Icelandic Synod. You may even remember my broken English too. This was on Thursday, June 25, 1959. Three days before I had been ordained by the Bishop of Iceland in Reykjavik Cathedral. As the convention was beginning, I left Iceland with my family and accompanied by the Rev. Eric Sigmar, former president of our Synod, and we arrived on the second day of the convention.

I came to Canada with mixed feelings of fear and hope. I feared because I had no practice in speaking English and because I was bringing my family into the unknown. On the other hand, I knew enough about America and church life on this continent to hope that this would be a great experience for both me and my wife; and our hopes have come true. These two years certainly have been a great experience. We should not have feared because the Lord is with us, but as we had expected we have had difficulties. When I say that we have had difficulties, I am not complaining, because that is God's way of bringing us up. I have grown a lot during these two years, and what I have learned here will affect the rest of my life — in fact my wife has already warned me not to start every sermon when I go back to Iceland with "when I was in America."

But what has it been like to be a pastor in a Lutheran Church in America?

Even though I have been here for

two years, my knowledge of American churches is very limited. The ULCA is the only church I have seen in action, and my first hand experience is limited to the Icelandic Synod and a couple of congregations in the Pacific Synod. In general, I know more about U.S. church life than the churches in Canada, mostly because the magazines I read are U.S. publications. My evaluation is, of course, based on my former experience, and being an Icelander, an Islander and a European, I see things from a different angle than you do. That is probably why I have been asked to speak on this subject here tonight.

I came to this country to learn, mainly practical things, and I have kept my eyes open and taken in everything I have been able to. Much of this I have not digested yet, but I am now going to show you my collection; what I have gathered. I tend to be critical, so I may sound that way at times, but it is meant to be constructive, whether it is or not.

The first thing that impressed me, coming from a country where 95% of the people are supposed to be Lutheran, and 1-2% attend church on an average Sunday, was the activity of the congregations and the general participation of people of all ages in the Service. Coming from a state church, I was also impressed by the amount of money the people gave of their free will to the church, and the emphasis on stewardship fascinated me. The unity of the church and the good will between churches and individuals also impressed me,

since the church in Iceland has been torn to pieces by violent theological and personal disputes and the people left in the cold while the leaders of the church plucked out each other's eyes.

What I like about the church here is that it is active, friendly and has a strong emphasis on stewardship. I have learned much in management and planning is good in your church. Materially the church is well off and equipment and materials are abundant and generally good. Co-operation between clergy and laity is good and there are many hard working laymen in the church as it should be. But it seems to me that the strongest program in the Lutheran Church here in America is the Sunday School program. It is outstanding and the long-range program is a model program for other churches.

The strength of the Sunday School program lies in its vitality, it is not stagnant, but constantly improved and changed with changing times. And it is strong also because it combines theory and practice, planning and devotion. Other programs of the church tend to be strong in planning and practice, but weak in theory and devotion — Resource magazine is the best church magazine I have come across anywhere. Its strength is in its masterly combination of theory and practice.

Up until now I have spoken about the positive aspects of American church life as I see it, but now I will point out the weaknesses and the dangers, which I have observed.

You may have concluded from what I said earlier about the church in Iceland, that it is a weak or even a dying church — but that is not so. Its strength is in the individual. In Iceland we think more in "I-and-Christ" terms, but here you think more in "I-and-the-church" terms. Here the strength is in the group.

In Iceland, it is a scandal to be a confessed Christian, and the faith of the individual has been tested, and the Christians have had to fight for their faith. Sometimes theological disputes are necessary, and always better than comprising one's faith. The church in Iceland has failed in many ways, and it is weak where your church is strong, that is in the practical, but it is stronger in theory. But you may ask: what is the use of theory or doctrine if it is not put to practice? But I ask: what is the use for practice without doctrine?

Here I see a combination of a danger from outside and an inner weakness, which I think you should be on guard for.

The point is this. Your church is threatened from the outside by a semi-pagan community, which is friendly. The church is living in too much peace. It is a bit spoiled by having much money and because it consists of people who often are spoiled by not having to fight for their life nor their faith. In other words, wealth, prosperity and creeping paganism threatens the church.

In a situation like this it is of the greatest importance for a well planned and active church to be theological as well as practical. What I mean is, that the planning and the activity within the church has to have theological motivation. And the individual must know what he believes and stick to it.

This I find to be the weakness of this church and churches in America in general; they are not strong enough in doctrine and in theology. There is a noticeable lack of theological discussion, and even pastors when they get together talk more about church attendance than theological problems. This does not mean that the church here in America is not thinking, but it

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# Report From "Little J. C. L. U."

## Held in Saskatoon — Aug 14-15

*By Rev. Wallace Bergman, Synodical Representative*

During the past few years our United Lutheran Church in America has been in the process of negotiating a merger with three other North American Lutheran bodies. Gradually the union plans have progressed, and last June at our Synodical Convention we took the big step which all of the thirty-two Synods of the U.L.C.A. have taken — we voted in favor of the merger. This means that we as a part of the U.L.C.A. will be joining with fellow-Lutherans to form a new church, to be known as the **Lutheran Church of America.**

The merger will mean a realignment of all present Synods, the redrawing of Synodical lines, and the merging of assets and liabilities. In Western Canada, the merger plan calls for the formation of two Synods in the new Church — one covering the area including Northern Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan; the other, Alberta, British Columbia and the Yukon. In order to effect this arrangement — to set up the new Synods, draw up constitutions, and consider all the matters pertaining to the ending of the old Synodical structures, and the organizing of the new Synod — meetings of representatives of the existing Synods on territory are necessary. The first such meeting was held in Saskatoon last August.

The merger in the larger church, U.L.C.A., is being handled by a Joint Commission on Lutheran Union (JCLU) with representation from the four merging Churches. Therefore the handling of merger

details on the Synodical level has been done by representative groups known as the "Little JCLU."

It should be remembered that the decisions and plans of this group are not final, but are a suggested framework to be presented to the constituting conventions of the two new Synods, which will be held next summer. It is there that the final arrangements will be made.

It is impossible in a brief report like this to outline and explain the many matters discussed at the meeting. Much of it had to do with necessary detail and the evaluation of the present set-up and the churches involved. Some recommendations of interest brought forth were these: (a) Manitoba-Saskatchewan Synod be known as the Central Canada Synod. (b) Alberta-B.C. Synod be known as the Western Canada Synod. (c) Recommended headquarters sites were — for Central Canada Synod — Winnipeg and for Western Canada Synod — Edmonton.

The next "Little JCLU" meeting was held in Winnipeg, Nov. 20-21, continuing where the first one left off. A report on this meeting will be included in the next issue of this paper. Apologies to American parishes of our Synod may be in order since this report deals only with what is happening in the merger in Canada. But when you realize that something very similar is taking place in your area affecting you, you may find the report helpful and interesting.

## News Flashes

His Excellency, Asgeir Asgeirson, President of Iceland, and his Lady, Fru Dora Thorhallsdottir, were present at the Icelandic evening service at the First Lutheran Church on Sunday, Sept. 17th. The local pastor conducted the service as usual and preached on the gospel lesson for the day. Rev. P. M. Petursson, of the local Unitarian Church, preached a short sermon also. The combined choirs, under the direction of Mrs. Bjorg V. Isfeld, rendered appropriate selections, and Mrs. Pearl Johnson, the church soloist, offered a vocal solo. The congregation sang two hymns composed by Mrs. Asgeirson's father, Rev. B. Halldorsson, of Laufas, Iceland. Following the service, refreshments were served and a fellowship hour enjoyed.

Mr. and Mrs. Hallgrimur Hallgrimson, Reykjavik, Iceland, were visitors in Argyle parish on Sept. 18-19. He is the son of the late Fridrik Hallgrimson who served as pastor in this parish 1903-1927. Mr. Hallgrimson, Consul-General of Iceland, and his wife accompanied the President of Iceland, Mr. Asgeir Asgeirson, on his state visit to Canada. They left the party after the festivities in Winnipeg to renew acquaintances in this district. Hallgrimur received his early education in Baldur and so it was interesting for him to come back to see the community and his old friends again. Mr. and Mrs. Hallgrimson were honored by a party

at Glenboro where over seventy people were present. Hallgrimur was presented with an engraved desk set and a presentation of flowers was made to Mrs. Hallgrimson.

Mr. and Mrs. Hallgrimson left on Wednesday for Toronto to visit with his sister.

An Evangelism Mission was conducted at The First Lutheran Church, October 8-11. The guest speaker was the Rev. Carveth P. Mitchell, D.D., of Mansfield, Ohio, who is widely known in the Church for his eloquence and penetrating insights into the truths of the Scripture, as well as his understanding of human problems. He has been popular with the armed forces in the U.S.A., and has visited and preached at many outposts both in Europe and the Far East. He has for many years been pastor of the First English Lutheran Church, Mansfield, Ohio, the largest Lutheran Church in Ohio, having over five thousand baptized members.

The Ladies Aid of First Lutheran observed their 75th Anniversary on Thursday, Oct. 5th, with a program of songs and speeches conducted in the Lower Auditorium of the Church under the direction of the Ladies Aid President, Mrs. Carl Thorlaksson.

Pastor Jon Bjarman and family have left the Lundar parish and our Synod, returning to Iceland. They left in mid October, Pastor Bjarman having received a call to serve a parish there. May the Lord bless them in their new field of service.



## *Seminar Held*

Evangelism Lay Visitors' Seminar was held at First Lutheran Church, Winnipeg, on Saturday, October 21st. The purpose of this Seminar was to help the leaders in the congregation to train lay visitors and to give them the proper background to make their visiting more effective. To those who attended this seminar, we are sure that it filled a very important need in preparing visitors to witness for their church.

Attendance was as follows: Western Canada Synod, 21; Augustana, 1; Icelandic Synod, 21.

Group discussion leaders were: Arthur Jonasson, Haldor Bjarnason and Walter Schultz.

Also on the program were: Palestine Travelogue — Dr. V. J. Eylands; Devotions — Rev. W. Becker; Bible Study — Rev. P. Klatt; Closing Address — Rev. Kurt Keitel.

The attendance from our Synod was fair and we hope the attendance will be better next year for we are planning on having this an annual event.

## *Vacation School*

Vacation Church Schools were held in several of our parishes this past summer. We have only received information on three of them. Langruth had an enrollment of 73; average attendance of 58. They had a closing program with fellowship hour and refreshments following.

Selkirk had a total enrollment of 47, with average attendance over 40. They also had a closing program with displays and presentation of attendance awards.

At First Lutheran, the school was conducted during the last two weeks in August, under the direction of Sister Laufey Olson. The enrollment was 211.

## *Youth Sunday*

Reports of Youth Sunday observance in our Synod have been received from Langruth, Selkirk and First Lutheran, Winnipeg.

In Langruth, Youth Night was held on September 17th with all the young people in the district being invited. There were fifty-four in attendance.

In Selkirk, also on September 17th, members of the Luther League conducted the entire morning worship service, giving a presentation on the theme "Lord, I Believe."

At First Lutheran, Youth Sunday was observed on September 24th at which time the young people participated in the presentation on the theme "Lord, I Believe."

On October 25th, members of the United Lutheran Church Women groups of Arborg, St. Stephen's and Selkirk, met in Selkirk. Also present as guests were members of the women's organizations of the Gimli congregation. Purpose of the meeting was to hear reports, evaluate the work of the individual groups and to share ideas. It was also decided the groups should organize formally as a Synodical unit, and an executive was elected which was to serve as a committee to draw up a constitution.

Officers elected were: President, Mrs. Olive Kurbis, Selkirk; Vice-president, Mrs. Katherine Becker, St. Stephen's; Secretary, Mrs. Christine Johnson, Arborg; Treasurer, Mrs. Margaret Larnar, Selkirk; Statistical Secretary, Mrs. Valdine Scrymgeour, St. Stephen's.

A new Sunday School was started in the Langruth parish, in Lakeland (South) on October 1st, with Mrs. Evelyn Eriksson as superintendent.

### *How The Lutheran Church Looks To Me (con't)*

is thinking too much in practical terms. Take for instance a stewardship or evangelism workshop. All the plans and procedures are explained to the people and the leaders go into details. But then they add, this is of course only a plan and you have to put Christ into it if it is to serve its purpose. True enough. But that is probably the main problem. The people need to be taught to express their faith and to understand their own faith so that they can convey it to others. What they need is a Bible course where they can discuss their beliefs and ask questions about Christian teachings.

It seems to me that the weakest link in the work of the church is the youth work. I have been thinking hard for a long time trying to find out where the weakness is. I am convinced that there is definitely something wrong with the Luther League program. And now I think that I have isolated at least one of the factors. The church does not have a strong enough theology for the youth. Compare the way Sunday School children are taught the Gospel, with what the Luther League gets, and you will find that the Luther League is neglected. Children in Sunday School can express themselves with crayons; they enjoy drawing a church; but teenagers need to express themselves in dramatic ways and do something on their own. They want to BE the church.

Even though I myself never was in Sunday School in my life, I had the fortune of joining a strong Christian youth group, which functions within the framework of Y.M.C.A. and the Y.W.C.A. in Iceland, and is connected with the Inter-Varsity-Fellowship of Christian students. I started in this group when I was sixteen. In this group there was not much entertainment, the emphasis being on

preaching, singing, praying and Bible study. We did all the work ourselves and that gave us an opportunity to grow, and gave strength to the group. I was asked to preach, or rather to have a short meditation, the first year I took part. I was scared and I read my short sermon without even looking up. But this helped me, it gave me an opportunity to do my own thinking and phrasing the feelings of my heart. And prayer — three times a week we gathered for prayer, sometime few, sometimes many, and I will never forget some of these meetings. We learned to pray by praying with each other.

The point I am trying to make is this. Are you not underestimating the abilities of your youth to grow in faith? Are you not underestimating their yearning for a meaningful Christian life? Are you not partly denying them to become the church, by not challenging them enough? Are you not wasting a lot of talent by not giving them enough opportunity to express their faith, not in something which is put on, but in real life?

These young people thirst for being men and women, and they thirst for a meaningful Christian life. It seems to me we are setting the goals for the young people, in this synod at least, far too low.

Four more points:

**EVANGELISM:** I think evangelism is the centre of the program of the church, and it should be. Stewardship should be put under evangelism like social action. Stewardship cannot be promoted, it cannot be emphasized except in evangelism.

**PRAYER:** In the prayer life I see a paradox. Prayers are mostly read and composed in complicated language. I myself prefer simple prayers, but theological preaching. But here, preaching is simple (in the

positive meaning of the word), and prayers theological.

**THE MERGER:** I am all for the merger, but I am against total merger of all the protestant churches in America. If that comes about, much of the colorfulness of American church life would be lost. The church can be one without all congregations being alike.

**FOREIGN MISSION:** This synod should give more attention to foreign missions. A missionary from this synod would enrich our fellowship.

There are many other things I

would like to speak about, but I think this is enough. Please forgive me if I have been unreasonable.

I am a fortunate man to have the opportunity to be with you, and I am thankful for the support of the Board of American Missions, which made it possible for me to come here to Canada, and I am also grateful to the Icelandic Synod and the congregation I am serving, for showing me the trust to call me to serve her.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The above address was given at the Synod Convention on June 2, 1961.

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*Excerpt from President's Report (con't)*

American Lutheran tradition. We have been fiercely individualistic. We have been, until recently, a linguistic Synod, hardly very Evangelical, rather confined and restricted in range of our interests. We have fought the ultra-liberal element within our racial group and we have fought each other until we have almost bled to death. But we managed to carry on until our big brother, the United Lutheran Church of America, ran supporters under us so that we were able to survive and we have never been in better shape as a Synod than we are right now. But we have never ranked very highly in the councils of this larger church and we are the least and the last among its thirty-two Synods. We are the smallest

in numbers and the poorest in stewardship according to the latest tabulation which I have seen covering this matter. And now, at this Convention, we are called upon to render a vote and express our opinion as to whether the thirty-two Synods of the United Lutheran Church, including ourselves, shall take a long-planned and much prayed for step forward towards further Lutheran unity. We should remember that although small, our Synod has just as big a voice in this matter as any of our sister Synods and our vote in this matter is just as important as theirs. What will our answer be? Shall we try to turn back the clock and decide to be on our own as we were before 1940 when we joined the fellowship of the United Lutheran Church?

